

Testimony of Karen Swanson, CSPM, CFER, CSPDT

Submitted to the Public Health Committee

SB 894 AN ACT CONCERNING PERSONS WHO DECONTAMINATE  
MEDICAL INSTRUMENTS

Good afternoon Senator Gerratana, Representative Johnson, and distinguished members of the Public Health Committee. My name is Karen Swanson; I am a Central Service Team Leader at Connecticut Children's Medical Center.

I have been in the sterile processing profession for 33 years. I worked as central service technician for 6 of those years before I became a leader. I would like to illustrate the importance of certified central service technicians by telling you about the changes I have witnessed in my career. 33 years ago we were not performing the complex surgical procedures we do today. There was one or two simple instrument sets for each procedure. There were no complex surgical devices. We did not have 10 to 20 or more instrument and implant sets for just one surgical procedure. We did not routinely use sets loaned to us by the manufacturer. There were no detailed instructions specific to each individual instrument or set for cleaning and sterilization of devices that had to be approved by the Food and Drug Administration. Regardless of the device, we cleaned and sterilized everything the same way because the sterilization experts told us that was the way to do it.

Today's surgical devices are extremely complex with multiple parts and hidden channels that require cleaning but cannot be seen. Device manufacturers must present cleaning and sterilization instructions to the FDA and Central Service technicians must interpret and explicitly follow these instructions. We now have multiple cleaning steps and multiple sterilization cycles that cannot be deviated from. Failure to perform just one step can cause serious harm to not only our patients, but our co-workers as well. This is why certification and continuing education of our central service leaders and technicians should be required.

As a patient, you can pick the best hospital and the best surgeon but if the instruments used for your surgery have not been properly cleaned and sterilized you are at risk of infection. Wouldn't you want the people performing this job to have more education to do this job properly?

I would be pleased to answer any questions. Thank you.